



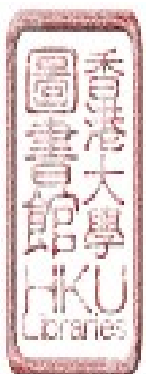
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BRANDING, MARKETING AND CULTURAL CONSUMPTION: CITY MAGAZINE AS AN EXAMPLE

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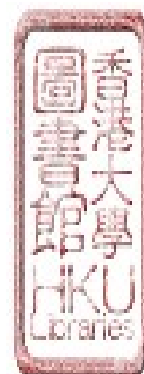
BRANDING, MARKETING AND CULTURAL CONSUMPTION: CITY MAGAZINE AS AN EXAMPLE

ABSTRACT

One of the most enduring brands in Hong Kong's consumer and lifestyle culture is *City Magazine*, a publication founded in the late seventies, shortly before the height of consumer culture within the regional and global market. Given the fact that the magazine has no concrete marketing culture, the endurance of the magazine for a period of more than 30 years after its first run is a focal point in understanding the convergence between the consumer culture and the brand. Most importantly, it helps with understanding whether the magazine was responsible for perpetuating consumerism in Hong Kong or it merely proliferated because of the prevalence of this culture given the decade.

Nevertheless, *City Magazine* has become synonymous with Hong Kong's consumer culture and their unique identity. It represented the cosmopolitan nature of Hong Kong, the city's resilience under considerable unfavorable conditions and the region's ability to establish its own identity, cause and organization. The paper is an exploration of the similarities between the ideals that developed and established *City Magazine* and those that put Hong Kong at a regionally advantageous position in the economic and consumer market of Asia.

While marketing campaigns are short-lived, brands are the perennial trait of consumer culture. Marketing strategies are created to get the attention of consumers depending on the time period, the product being pitched and the market economy. To market a product, a high degree of creativity must be applied to get the consumer's interest. In order to maintain that interest and ensure continuity in sales, the product must have a recognizable brand, one that gives consumers a meaning that they can attach to the product.



INTRODUCTION

Hong Kong Through the Ages

Hong Kong is found on the very edge of the Asian continent and is perhaps the most well-known city of the region. It has a unique history mixed with a high degree of Western Culture influence and this has made it an appealing destination with so many people from so many parts of the world constantly flocking it. Because it is on the edge, it is accessible and because there is a mix of culture, it is cosmopolitan. Every decade in the twentieth century has marked Hong Kong as a centre ahead of the times and trends. In the 1940s, the city had a considerably modest number of inhabitants who were a little over 1 million. Twenty years later, in the 1960s, production of clothing and textiles created an economic boom. The economy grew to establish Hong Kong into an international finance center by the 1970s and a satellite city of global capitalism¹. The boundaries between Hong Kong and China were marked with an obvious sense of material difference due to contrasts in modernization and “marketization”².

Much of Hong Kong and its inhabitants were deemed to be superficial, because of its consumer culture. Furthermore, that its lack of urban history or identity, given that much of it was borrowed from Western Culture, made it prone to internal fragmentation. Ma³ notes how new migrants during this period found themselves caught up in a paradoxical mix of the liberal vision of modern living. Such living was composed of a disciplinary and discriminatory reality of Hong Kong. However, a culture oriented turn emphasizing local ethos based on a

¹ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 14.

² Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 14.

³ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 14.



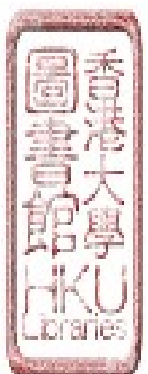
common language and the geographical location, reverted Hong Kong's cultural situation in the 1980s. One of the cultural aspects touched was the creation of a film industry that focused on telling and preserving on local stories. In addition to this, it encouraged the engagement of local people in such a way that they would become famous as the Hollywood of the East.

These changes were also reflected in other scenes especially in the arts. In popular music, as a means of reflecting the linguistic integrity of the region, Cantopop has been a local genre since the 1970s. Two elements made Hong Kong what it was: consumerism and the disciplined culture. Increasing consumerism saw many of the world's most iconic brands and names converge in what would be a capital of high culture. Branding and icons were central to what made Hong Kong the city it grew to be and a cultural melting pot. Media institutions were able to take advantage of these platforms to increase advertising for a mature market. It had the double effect of triggering mass consumption among inhabitants. The market became conducive and stable for economic growth and expansion and the development of print media to take advantage of such spaces.

City Magazine and 1980s Hong Kong Culture

The *City Magazine*, formerly named “*The Tabloid*” (1976-77), was founded by John Chan (陳冠中), Peter Dunn (鄧小宇), Joseph Yau (丘世文) and Henry Wu (胡君毅) in Hong Kong in 1976.⁴ The birth of the magazine can be attributed to John Chan, who at the time had only just received a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology at The University of Hong Kong and went on to

⁴ Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Post War Hong Kong: *City Magazine* and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture” in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwok B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 198.



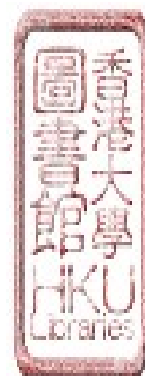
obtain a Master's degree in News at Boston University. John, Peter, Joseph and Henry were all educated and had strong interests in local and popular culture, which is what made them get along. John was inspired to make the style of *City Magazine* in the model of American magazines such as the *Rolling Stone* and more specifically, *The Village Voice*⁵, a free weekly newspaper founded in New York in 1955. *The Village Voice* represented much of New York culture and it contained investigative articles, analysis and reviews of current affairs and culture, arts and music coverage, and event listings within the city. Because of John's ambition in bringing a similar *The Village Voice* to Hong Kong, *City Magazine* started out by becoming a lifestyle magazine covering various areas of interests such as culture, arts, eatery, architecture, living, design and fashion. However, there were also topics on recent political and social issues in the form of essays and reviews. Since 1980s, *City Magazine* became an avant-garde local magazine not only because of its interesting and penetrating content but also its unique paper size, as well as the eye-catching cover design. As a result, the magazine came to be deeply connected to the landscape of the public imagination⁶.

In the early stage, *City Magazine* was operated with a small group of people who had interests and knowledge in various areas in Hong Kong society, and also had a global perspective of current trends and topics. The editors acted as the shareholders of the magazine⁷. They were passionate to make a magazine of their own that enabled them to freely say anything and share with readers, which was reflective of the free port Hong Kong had become. Unsurprisingly, it was not

⁵ Voice Media Group. < <http://www.voicemediagroup.com/> >

⁶ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 209.

⁷ Chun, Allen. "Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Post War Hong Kong: *City Magazine* and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture" in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwok B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 198.



smooth and easy for a group of youngsters to run a business at that time. First of all, the lack of money was the biggest concern of sustaining the business. Allen Chun observes that when the magazine began operating, profitability was very marginal and almost in the red⁸. Secondly, the circulation of the magazine was not impressive due to the narrowed distribution network. The exposure to the readers directly affected the revenue. Thirdly, the contents and subjects were too penetrating compared with other traditional magazines. The views in the magazine were too progressive and intellectual⁹.

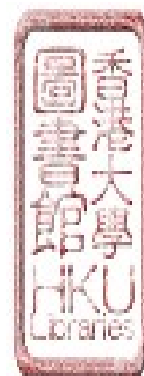
In 1982, Mr. Si Yeung Tak (施養德), a well-known graphic designer, joined *City Magazine* as a partner. The most significant breakthrough Mr. Si made was to change the layout of the magazine to a bigger size (43cm x 28cm), a move that encouraged increased advertising and added the aesthetic appeal of the issues that followed. The new size of the magazine attracted the brands such as Joyce Ma, Eddie Lau, Cartier and Hermes, to put ads and therefore the revenue started to increase since then. Because of the new art direction, the avant-garde magazine cover also made a huge success in print media industry. It was the time *City Magazine* became a legend in Hong Kong because of its creativity and innovation.

Influence on Consumer Society

To a certain extent, *City Magazine* was considered to be a driving force to stimulate the consumer society in the 1980s. The 1980s were defined by individualism and the need for unique identity. These ideals were marked by

⁸ Chun, Allen. "Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Post War Hong Kong: *City Magazine* and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture" in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwok B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 199.

⁹ Chun, Allen. "Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Post War Hong Kong: *City Magazine* and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture" in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwok B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 199.



conspicuous consumption of products that represented the “me” perspective and the increasing need for identity saw an increased interest in designer labels and logos as a means of branding and marking products. This was largely typified by a frequency of pricey, affected designer fashions, which implied the image of a money-obsessed and identity-based society. Most importantly, logos worked as focal points of materials such as denim, handbags, and jewelry and formed the iconoclasm around Hong Kong and *City Magazine*. Ma¹⁰ carries out a psychological mapping of these changes and adaptations by contrasting these movements in Hong Kong with those of the rest of China. These were iconic signifiers of modernity and affluence across the border and in Hong Kong, they were novelties and indulgences.

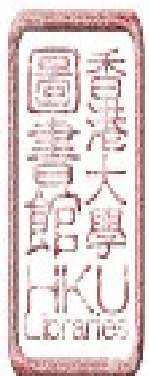
In Fall 1989, *City Magazine* published a special edition with three topics: City Magazine 12th Anniversary Issue (號外 12 年精華總結集), Women Of The Decade and Hong Kong Yuppies Into The Next Decade. Yuppies¹¹ (Young Urban Professionals) were described as individuals who dressed up in classy business attire. As a result, many women began “power-dressing” for the workplace in designer skirt-suit combinations that featured large shoulder pads, borderline masculine or androgynous. Interestingly, bright, bold, and neon colors were widely used to draw attention to themselves. Keeping with the American culture, fashion also featured stretch fibers and synthetic blends and the dramatic popularity was further fueled by the “fitness craze.”

Postmodernism was all the rave in the eighties, not just in fashion but also in architecture and building design. Most of it was influenced by the ideas of

¹⁰ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 209.

¹¹ The New York Times. *Tell-Tale Signs of the Modern-Day Yuppie*.

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/10/fashion/tell-tale-signs-of-the-modern-day-yuppie.html>>

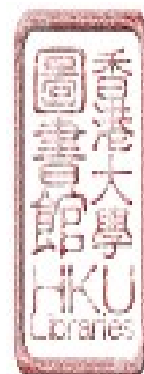


fantasy and escapism as a means of pushing the imagination and subverting reality. The urban landscape in Hong Kong was an echo of these movements. Interestingly, the movement was popular with Japanese designers who came up with avant-garde collections that Western capitals soon came to adopt. These designers largely played with volume and proportion. The idea of accessorizing can also be attributed to this era with big hair, brightly colored shoes and jewelry, funky hats and flashy costumes. People grew to be more image conscious and deliberate with gym clothing even featuring on the runway and a new focus on underwear, which brought about Calvin Klein. Teenagers dressed according to what they saw on television and they let people like Madonna define their styles.

With that said, *City Magazine* in April 1978 issue featured a cover story of “The 3rd Power of Hong Kong Fashion” (香港時裝的第三勢力), the soft punk in Hong Kong style. Another special issue in 1990 was “Beauty in the 90s”. Each decade, *City Magazine* published segments that reflected changes in style, fashion and preferences as a wider demonstration of the concerns of the particular period of time.

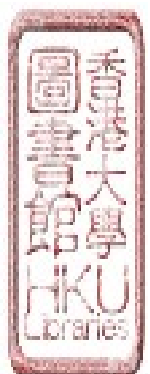
Current Trends: the Intersection of Economy and Technology

When we look back to *City Magazine*, it has undergone many radical changes throughout 39 years. It started off with several youngsters with huge ambitions and interests in playing a role in print media industry in Hong Kong. Later, many talents such as John Shum (岑建勳), Tina Liu (劉天蘭), Sunny Wong and William Chang (張叔平) joined in and made *City Magazine* to become an irreplaceable avant-garde local magazine in Hong Kong. In the 1990s, *City Magazine* was acquired by a businessman Peter Mak (麥浚翹). At that time, the content of the magazine was prone to be heavily lifestyle and



materialistic. There were controversies in the public saying the essence and spirit of *City Magazine* seemed to be fading out. In 2003, the business was acquired by Modern Media (現代傳播), a media company headquartered in Mainland China. Since then, *City Magazine* intended to make a balance between lifestyle and cultural and societal focuses. It is impossible for the magazine to totally ignore the advertisements because it is the way for them to generate revenue. As a matter of fact, the rise of consumer society in Hong Kong since has not been changed, it has become a part of living style since the 1980s.

The advancement of technology has had a direct impact on the print media industry both in Hong Kong and globally. Smartphones and computers have given new modes of access because of their ability to enable both text and graphics. Through them, people are also able to connect with each other on virtual networks such as Facebook and Twitter using the Internet. The Internet has empowered consumers to actively participate in media, rather than passively observing its production process. Smartphones have apps such as Instagram, largely for photographs and Twitter for microblogging, which allow people to actively contribute dialogues that go beyond the mundane social confines. Most importantly, it allows them to exchange information and make themselves better known on free to use platforms. At its most fundamental level, this change in the interaction with media, specifically social media, reflects increasing connectivity. The rise of Internet has allowed people to communicate instantly from one corner of the world to another and to do so in a remarkably unfettered way. Cultural boundaries have become more temporally and physically unstable as a result.



With the advent of Internet communication, a cultural boundary can be crossed independent of whether one is physically crossing a territorial border¹².

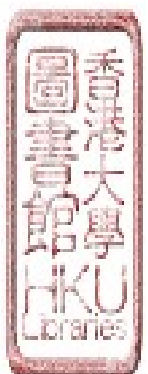
The Internet has unquestionably become the most powerful tool for modern marketing because of its speed, accessibility and affordability. The ability to share limitless types of content brought about the need for advertisers to become extremely creative with their campaigns in order to quickly get a viewer's attention.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It has been 39 years since *City Magazine* was established. Yet City Magazine maintains its goal in being indicator of lifestyle in Hong Kong. Can it be achieve without a detailed branding and marketing plans, especially when facing the challenge of digital media? The change in reading behaviors imposes threat on the development of traditional media, like publication.

In this research, I focus on three areas: First, how *City Magazine* preserves its values and uniqueness in an ever-changing society? Do they have an adaptation strategy? Do they preempt trends? Are they influenced by global trends and if so, do they attempt to localize those patterns through their content? What challenge and opportunity does this process present? Second, what are the branding strategies adopted in facilitating the transition of *City Magazine* in print media industry? How does *City Magazine* maintain its competitive position in the eye of current readers, and how does the magazine bring in new readers? Third, how the editorial strategies are formulated to accommodate the change in social value and customer preference?

¹² Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 21.



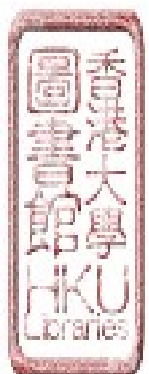
Through these questions, the aim for this research is to find out the uniqueness and attractiveness of *City Magazine* in comparison with other publications in Hong Kong. *City Magazine* established itself at the height of consumerism in the eighties; therefore it is pertinent to ask in what way does *City Magazine* currently act as a driving force to stimulate the consumer society in Hong Kong similar to that in 1980s? Further research hopes to delve into the emergent public and how radically different notions of ethnicity, cultural identity, nationalism and colonialism intersected with market capitalism¹³.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Aside from textual engagement with the content and material in *City Magazine*, the paper hopes to include arguments presented in a number of essays and articles by scholars interested in the development of the magazine and its influence on the sociological and intellectual roots of mass cosmopolitan culture in the 1980s. The first is a collection of essays edited by Martyn J. Lee, which carries out a sociological study of consumer culture and how it is shaped by constructions within print media. It offers an insight on the preoccupations of modern audiences and how material is produced in response to these preoccupations. His intellectual narrative examines theoretical and conceptual foundations, where he examines consumerism through the lenses of ideals adopted from Karl Marx, Michel de Certeau, Mike Featherstone among others. In the second and final section, the collection undertakes a study of the character of consumer culture in order to understand how elements such as aesthetics, language, politics and elements of dependence affect modes of consumerism.

¹³ Chun, Allen. "Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Post War Hong Kong: *City Magazine* and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture" in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwok B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 191.



Background of Founders and Editors

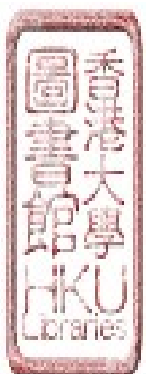
Throughout 39 years since *City Magazine* was published in 1976, the image of the magazine in the general public is of a high-end, bourgeois, luxurious and hippie publication. There are many reasons that naturally underlie this construct of the magazine's position in print media industry. First is the background of the founders and later the talents who joined in. They are all highly educated with rich knowledge in various areas such as music, films, culture, cuisine, social and political issues.

In Lee's collection of essays, Mike Featherstone¹⁴ argues that "the intellectuals (the dominated fraction of the dominant class), use the logic of symbolic systems to produce distinctions which contribute to the reproduction of the existing relations between classes and class fractions. In this they share with the bourgeoisie (the dominant fraction of the dominant class) an interest in maintaining the existing state of material class relations in which economic capital enjoys high prestige and a high exchange when converted into cultural capital. They will therefore always seek to increase the autonomy of the cultural field and enhance the scarcity of cultural capital by resisting moves towards a democratization of culture." The narrow audience of *City Magazine* is a reflection of these sentiments. *City Magazine* was able to achieve this through a subtle form of social criticism that sought to delineate its content from the masses, popular or public movements.

However, there is some element of unease in this mode of operation. Featherstone¹⁵ suggests that "if we turn to the new petite bourgeoisie habitus it is

¹⁴ Featherstone, Mike. "Lifestyle and Consumer Culture" in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 98-99.

¹⁵ Featherstone, Mike. "Lifestyle and Consumer Culture" in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 100.



clear that whereas the bourgeois has a sense of ease and confidence in his body...the new petit bourgeois is a pretender, aspiring to more than he is, who adopts an investment orientation to life; he possesses little economic or cultural capital and therefore must acquire it. The new petit bourgeois therefore adopts a learning mode to life; he is consciously educating himself in the field of taste, style and lifestyle.”

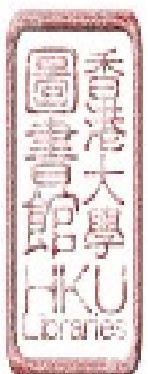
In a way, such constructions perpetuate norms that come to be adopted within the society, starting with the magazine’s readership. Wolfgang Fritz Haug¹⁶ notes that to understand this phenomenon, it is important to take into account the “normal” role and its interaction with the “imaginary.” Imaginary, should however not mean “unreal”, Haug urges readers to carefully note. Magazines like *City Magazine* have been at the frontline in expanding how people think about the real world and their place within it. Branding operates on this surface level, and through perpetuation of a particular brand, certain images become the norm.

Content and Subject of the Magazine

Second is the systematic body of content and subjects of the magazine. In the 1970-1980s, *City Magazine* indeed brought a shock to other publications in Hong Kong because it covered various edgy and critical topics in pop culture, music, arts, current news, eatery, gender, relationship and sex. Such content was built around the knowledge, exposure and understanding of the founders of the magazine. Furthermore, content was mostly produced to provoke audience responses and bring about debates. Featherstone¹⁷ uses Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984) to explain, “For Bourdieu taste in cultural goods function as a marker of

¹⁶ Haug, Wolfgang Fritz. “Aesthetic Abstraction of Commodity: Surface-Packaged-Advertising Image” in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2007).

¹⁷ Featherstone, Mike. “Lifestyle and Consumer Culture” in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), 97.

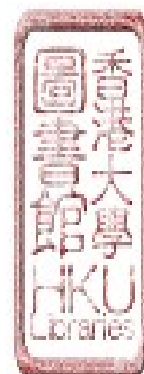


class and in *Distinction*, Bourdieu seeks to map out the social field of the different tastes in legitimated ‘high’ cultural practices (museum visits, concert-going, reading) as well as taste in lifestyle and consumption preferences (including food, drink, clothes, cars, novels, newspapers, magazines, holidays, hobbies, sports, leisure pursuits.) Both culture in the ‘high’ sense and culture in the anthropological sense are therefore inscribed on the same social space.”

Allen Chun¹⁸ details the content of the magazine in an essay in the collection *Doing Families in Hong Kong*. The 1976 issue, which was the first contained at least four feature essays and one tabloid report, which offered a balance of academic material and popularly consumed information in the form of the tabloid report. It reflects *City Magazine*’s balance of audience and expectations. The centerfold of the magazine was reserved for reviews, literary and critical as well as sightings for concerts and other events within Hong Kong. In this sense, content serves as a means through which people could receive information of high cultural practices. However, Chun is careful to note that the magazine was oriented towards Western culture or people who had attained a Westernized education. Being a cosmopolitan region, the content matched the prevailing culture in Hong Kong. One of the interesting assessments Chun makes is in the keywords used throughout the content of the magazine. These thirteen words were “image”, “fashion”, “style”, “perspective”, “middlebrow”, “taste”, “form”, “consumption”, “vogue”, “objectivity”, “high class”, “sensuality” and “culture”¹⁹. He goes on to observe that at the time, it was the only magazine to

¹⁸ Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry” in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 200.

¹⁹ Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry” in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 203.



deal with the 1960s counterculture including homosexuality, feminism and general topics on sex and sexuality.

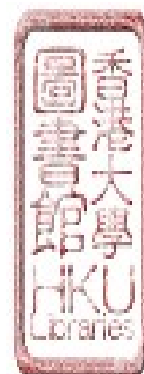
The views by Featherstone demonstrate how on a very basic level, *City Magazine* works as a point of convergence between these two elements and understandings of how culture operates: within the high sense and the anthropological sense. *City Magazine* largely places focus on the latter sense as content in the magazine gives readers access to lifestyle and consumption preferences. In fact, to some extent the magazine sets precedence on what kind of products their readers should consume and what brands to look out for. The idea is grounded in Marxist debates also highlighted in Lee's collection. The essay by Karl Marx²⁰ entitled "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" explores the phenomena of how consumer choices are informed by their relationship with a commodity. Marx²¹ describes a commodity as "a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labors appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor."

In essence, *City Magazine* works as such a commodity and through its content and background. The magazine reflects the kind of relationship it has with its readers and its outlook on culture in Hong Kong. Furthermore, it also demonstrates the relationship the consumers have with Hong Kong. The name of the magazine itself acts as a construct of the "city" of Hong Kong in a similar way *The Village Voice* does for New York. *City Magazine* claims Hong Kong through title, content and image. Marx²² observes this to be a reflection of how a

²⁰ Marx, Karl. "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000)

²¹ Marx, Karl. "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000)

²² Marx, Karl. "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000)

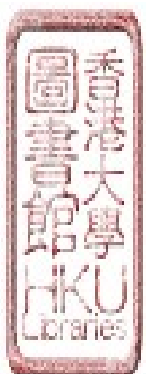


commodity, although produced by a small group of people, reflects “the labor of society”. Consumer relationship is also determined by the value they place on a product. Value, Marx informs the reader, is not the label placed on a product. Rather, it is the ability to convert a product into a “social hieroglyphic” that reflect the prevalent culture of the time. It is important to highlight that *City Magazine* achieve this largely through the image they portray, which rounds off debate to the third element: the magazine cover.

Visual Appeal

The magazine cover is the key selling tool because it is the first point of interaction and access between the product and the user or consumer. In fact, print media heavily relies on the cover of the product because covers sell and they also determine sales. Today, we can look back and see how *City Magazine* has affected the way we perceive the world. The magazine cover, especially *City Magazine* has had a key role in its staying power and exceptionality. One of the roles is performed was in providing the canvas for some of the world’s greatest designers and art directors to give the world and readers their vision, and has most importantly created lasting icons such as Chow Yun Fat in shampooing, Andy Lau half naked laying down and Liza Wang in a pink rabbit costume. Crowley²³ brings out a quote from Neal Gabler, author of *Life, the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality*, “The primacy of entertainment...converts our politics into entertainment, our religion into entertainment, our education into entertainment, and virtually all of our magazines into vehicles of entertainment.” However, this does not undermine or subvert the magazine’s reflection of Hong Kong culture. If anything, it makes material more attractive, accessible and

²³ Crowley, David. *Magazine Covers*. (London: Mitchell Beazley, 2003), 93.



relatable especially to younger audiences and the then budding readership. The covers were used to entrench a certain image of Hong Kong and make readers reflect on their reality. Most importantly, the covers were advertisements.

According to Cheng²⁴, “Anthropological studies see advertisements as the ideological mirror of consumer society and as a cultural expression of changing norms, stereotypes and collective ideals.” These arguments inform what John Kenneth Galbraith²⁵ terms as “the dependence effect” in which consumer culture operates, and which enables the production of the magazine. Although his arguments are grounded in the 1950s advertising and branding culture, Galbraith’s points are pertinent in the consumer revolution of the 1980s Hong Kong when *City Magazine* was being published. He notes that “the even more direct link between production and wants is provided by the institutions of modern advertising and salesmanship.”²⁶ The covers of the magazines are designed to “create desire” by attracting the consumer to the commodity.²⁷ As a result, the consumer system has “fathered” the ability to produce.²⁸

“Aspirational” Format

Aside from the cover of the magazine, the layout is the fourth reason for the way *City Magazine* is perceived by the public. Following through on Galbraith’s points, as well as the previous arguments presented, it is easy to see how the aspirational format of *City Magazine* has influenced the notion of a

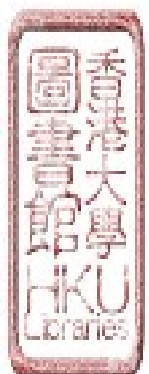
²⁴ Cheng, Helen Hau-ling. “Consuming a Dream: Homes in Advertisements and Imagination in Contemporary Hong Kong” in *Consuming Hong Kong*, ed. Gordon Mathews and Tai-lok Lui. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001). 206.

²⁵ Galbraith, John Kennedy. “The Dependence Effect” in *The Consumer Society Reader*. Ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000)

²⁶ Galbraith, John Kennedy. “The Dependence Effect” in *The Consumer Society Reader*. Ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000)

²⁷ Galbraith, John Kennedy. “The Dependence Effect” in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000.)

²⁸ Galbraith, John Kennedy. “The Dependence Effect” in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000.)



society whose goals surround securing a higher standard of living. *City Magazine* advertises products within the high end market as a means of demonstrating the best that consumers can purchase from within Hong Kong. Allen Chun²⁹ even describes the style of the magazine as having been the “staple of 1980s forward-looking, youth oriented and trendy popular culture.”

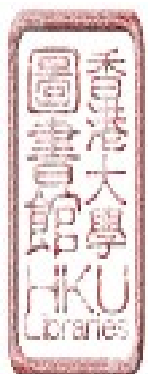
One of its most notable editions according to Chun is the April 1982 print, where the magazine revamped its design by doubling its size to from A4 to A3, printed the pages on glossy sheets and enhanced the textual and visual aesthetics with additional color illustrations to give it a more cosmopolitan and trendy look with elite aspirations.³⁰ The new format attracted advertising revenue, which provided the magazine with a more staple and sustainable revenue outside the direct consumers, which in a way made the magazine a little more traditional in its format when comparing it with international publications. In Hong Kong, *City Magazine*’s innovations put it at the frontline of development in the print industry.

Chun’s paper is just one of the highlights concerning the evolution of *City Magazine*’s framework. The article provides insights on how the design and layout influence the culture and also reflected it, in an interesting interplay of ideas. A deeper examination of *City Magazine*’s layout in comparison with other magazines in China in the 1980s is undertaken by Eric Kit-wai Ma.³¹ Ma reflects on the ways in which, despite being a localized magazine, *City Magazine* had an

²⁹ Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry” in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 191.

³⁰ Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry” in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 191

³¹ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 71ff.



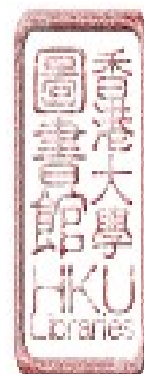
influence on the framework of other magazines throughout China, including *T.O.M.*, *Modern Weekly* and *China Life Magazine*, especially in the south.

Finally, one of the reasons for the construct of the magazine is the audience. From the start of the magazine as *The Tabloid*, the producers already had a niche in mind. This “niche community” was a generation of Hong Kong bred youth who were disenfranchised from the public domain by dominant population groups such as the diasporic and refugee constituencies of post-war China³². This group viewed itself as being outside the Cantonese sphere of influence, which informs the “localized” layout of the magazine and its more cosmopolitan and ambitious aims. For the 1980s, the movement of *City Magazine* was considered to be radical. Even in the present day, some of the topics do not sit too comfortably with the prevailing views.

The audience of *City Magazine* has largely influenced its core values to be an inspiration-oriented and inclusive publication. The commercial success of the magazine is largely registered through its audience, who has also contributed to the complex evolution. Because of the focus on the youth, Chun observes that *City Magazine* conversely became distanced from the older generation of diasporic residents.³³ Chun believes that the production of *City Magazine* then functioned at the expense of the latter generation, which led to the kind of “exclusivism” highlighted by Featherstone earlier. Nevertheless, despite this, *City Magazine* continued to experience commercial success within the emergent generation. It has been interesting to see whether through the years, *City Magazine* has remained

³² Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry” in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 203.

³³ Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry” in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 203.



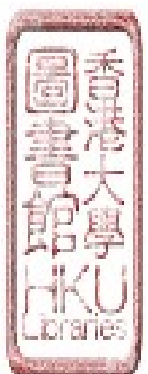
appealing to the generation who led to its proliferation, or if it only centers itself with each emerging crop of the decade. The paper is interested in such generational development of the product and brand.

METHODOLOGY

Justification

Having dominated the print industry scene in the 1980s, *City Magazine* established itself as synonymous with Hong Kong urban youth culture. The goal of this study is to understand how *City Magazine* has been able to endure in an environment that is constantly changing by examining its branding strategy, editorial process and competitive position. I used quantitative analysis for this research and obtained most of the information from structures in-depth interviews with four members of *City Magazine*: Chang Tieh Chih (張鐵志), Nico Tang (鄧焯榕), Ching Siu Wai (程少偉) and Carrie Siu (蕭貝文). Their collective and individual investment in the magazine is varies in terms of the roles and responsibilities they carry out and their period of time they have worked for the publication.

Chang Tieh Chih is the former chief editor of *City Magazine* and worked for it between 2012 and 2015. He came from Taiwan, and has worked extensively in media. His op-ed articles on various topical issues relating to current aspects of Asian culture have appeared in different media platforms in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Furthermore, Chang has extended his experience by publishing several books in Taiwan and China. One of the reasons for selecting Chang is because of his more recent engagement with *City Magazine*. He would provide insight on what brought about his interest in the magazine, and how his own background has influenced the content and structure.

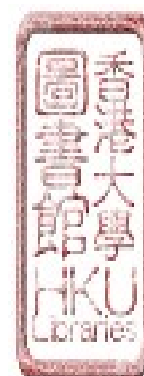


Nico Tang is the current Deputy Chief Editor of *City Magazine*. He joined in as an Assistant Editor in 2005 after his graduation in Lingnan University and once left the company in 2012. He re-joined City Magazine in April 2015. During the interview, he mentioned he is the only staff besides Ching Siu Wai who knows the history and development of *City Magazine* well because he was assigned to read the archives of the magazine for the 30th anniversary project back in 2007.

Ching Siu Wai is the current Creative Director and Publisher of *City Magazine*. He has been working at *City Magazine* for twenty-nine years. His involvement in the interview is largely because of his in-depth knowledge of the history, environment and challenges of the company. Finally, Carrie Siu is the current Senior Marketing Executive of *City Magazine*. She joined the company in 2014 and focuses on the marketing of *City Magazine*.

The interview, which was largely based on the research questions, provided in-depth information on the operations of the magazine and also gave an internal assessment of how *City Magazine* has managed to maintain its image and success. Questions were also able cover the same content. However, they were specific to the individual's department. For instance, the creative director, Ching Siu Wai, received questions that were more pertinent to how the magazine is able to generate ideas, what ideas are acceptable and how they determine the success of a new concept. In addition to this, the interview presents a generational perspective of the development of *City Magazine*. Through these generations, what new concepts have been adopted? Have there been conflicts with the traditional ideals of the magazine?

Data Analysis



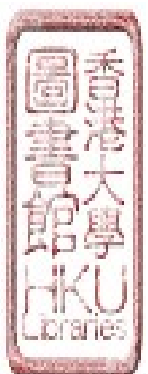
While the scholars examined in the Literature Review provide various theoretical concepts behind branding and consumerism, the information collected from the interviewees gives a more practical understanding of how they these concepts can be applied in relation to branding and marketing of *City Magazine*. As a result, the main purpose of this is to give meaning, experiences and views of the interviewees with regards to their product. The small sample enables an in-depth examination of these insights, which does not limit scope; instead, it concentrates our understanding of how the magazine has been operating.

RESULTS

General Information

The different respondents were able to provide varying information on similar content as well as give wider context to various operational aspects of the magazine. The generational context was the most significant, since it informs the prevailing success of *City Magazine* with different managers, editors and creative personalities. An assertion made by all four interviewees is that *City Magazine* continues to have a strong sense of times. The youthfulness of the group and their levels of education demonstrate the publication's ethos of bringing new voices and new generations within the production process as well as within the readership. All were in agreement that the magazine has become more society focused and less commercial and this can be seen in most of the recent covers and content of the magazine.

Nico Tang, especially because of his historical engagement with the magazine, is able to provide perspective on how over the decades the production of *City Magazine* has moved from individualistic concerns to consumerism to engaging more deeply with the social consciousness. For instance in the February



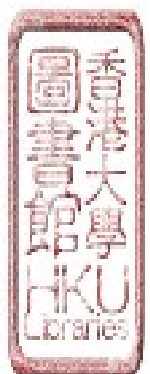
2015 issue, a cover story on Taipei Gay life was carried out, more recently in July the extras edition discussed the topic “No County for Young Men” in reference to a similar issue in UK’s *Financial Times*; however, with relevance to the state in Hong Kong where youth are unable to obtain employment, housing and social welfare opportunities.

In Relation to Marketing and Branding Strategies

City Magazine has no distinct marketing or branding strategy and often makes a decision on these aspects based on the issue they are currently working on. As a result there is a degree of flexibility in this area. However, this does not mean that they lack structure or values to maintain their reputation and ensure awareness and circulation.

From the interview with the Creative Director and Publisher Ching Siu Wai, the information derived is that in the early stages of production, the magazine staff host dinners with their clients and with each anniversary they have the same practice. It enables them to retain their customers because acts as a mode of appreciation. Throughout the production process, the magazine maintains contact with clients in order to ensure that by the final stages, the issue, edition or volume adheres to their expectations and standards.

The most interesting aspect of their commercial process is how they view branding versus marketing. *City Magazine* has been able to withstand more than 30 years of production because of the name itself and they continue to use this to maintain their reputation. While marketing is short lived, a brand name is more memorable and timeless and this distinction by Carrie Siu is remarkable. Perhaps elements of these can be seen in their December 1988 issue where they state that “a great city deserves a city magazine”.



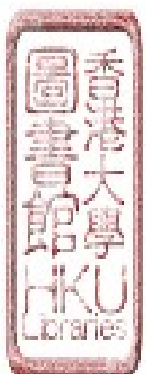
Difficulties in Production

In general, print media has had to reorganize their production process because of increasing pressure from other forms of media, especially the Internet. *City Magazine* has managed to take advantage of these spaces to increase awareness, maintain readership and enforce its brand. Their Facebook page, also called *City Magazine*, has about 30,000 people who like it. The page provides a link to their website and is kept up to date, providing information on their latest publications, upcoming features and other marketing news and events. However, such platforms are more likely to detract actual readership than promote it because people have faster access online and want information more quickly. News is constantly changing. For this reason, according to Deputy Chief Editor Nico Tang, the magazine has been facing the challenge of maintaining a good capacity to justify continued production because they have realized that reputation is not synonymous with circulation. From having a quick glance at their Facebook page, it is easy to see Nico's argument. Despite having about 30,000 followers, most of the posts are likes by handfuls of people and some of them are completely ignored.

FINDINGS

General Information

City Magazine actually does not have a concrete marketing or branding strategy. With each issue and volume, the editorial team and staff develop strategies around the content. Furthermore, with an industry that is constantly changing and facing competition from other forms of media, a lack of strategy does not mean that the magazine has no mode of operation. Rather, it reflects the flexibility of the staff, content and context. Each magazine has a unique



personality and this is perhaps the biggest contributor to the overall uniqueness of *City Magazine*. Nevertheless, from conducting a collective analysis, it is possible to establish a pattern in the branding and marketing strategies.

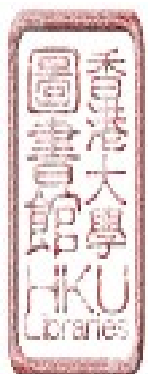
The greatest changes in the magazine, especially with relation to contemporary publication, were seen in the early 80s, where the ads they put in magazine were the friends of *City Magazine* (i.e. Joyce Ma, Eddie Lau, Cartier, Hermes). You may see it as a way of supporting the business of *City Magazine* and giving it a means of staple income. Advertisements proliferated the magazine following this period and the size of print copies was increased to make room for them³⁴. Chun³⁵ details the new structure of the magazine, by comparing March 1982's A4 issue, number 67, with the new edition published in the following month that was now in A3. While the March issue had text-based essays that took up fifty nine pages, the April issue reduced this number to forty-one. Thirteen full-paged paid advertisements ran in April compared with just four the month before. Non-commercial promotions reduced by three pages in April, and feature cartoons were done away with. The structure conveys the concerns of consumerism of the time.

The Role of the Magazine

For the reasons demonstrated above, we ask whether *City Magazine* is a part of driving force to boom the consumer society in Hong Kong and what its role in the sociocultural and market sector was. I would argue that “yes”, to a certain point *City Magazine* drove the consumerism movement, because of the

³⁴ Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry” *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 198.

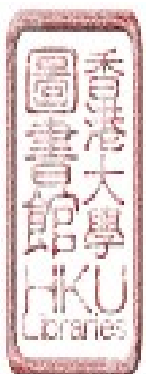
³⁵ Chun, Allen. “Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry” in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 205



various topics they covered that triggered the readers to consume and explore. The commercial desirability of the magazine was fostered by a balance of *City Magazine*'s aesthetic norms, eclectic quality and intellectual engagement. While these fueled sales and made the magazine highly commercial, *City Magazine* did not explicitly intend to foster consumption or materialistic. Contrasting information can be obtained from the interview with the former Chief Editor, Chang. He argues that the role of *City Magazine* was to make Hong Kong a better place. Based on the ethos in the 1980s, it can be seen that the producers of *City Magazine* wanted its readers to reflect on various aspects of Hong Kong and global culture. There is an attitude and style that the magazine created itself around. *City Magazine* was "the best kept secret in town". Despite its reputation, the content was only accessible to a select few within the local scene. It was iconoclastic, easily identifiable because of its unique layout. Following this period, it is easy to see that the magazine momentarily lost its direction because of market pressure and the need to generate revenue.

In the 90s, it is obvious to see *City Magazine* was "corrupted" in terms of the direction of the magazine. There are many reasons behind, one is the advertising industry was booming even more than in the 80s. Advertising for most magazines enables operations because it brings in revenue. However, advertising can also influence the content of a magazine because of affiliations, and it creates a form of dependency. During the 1990s, the development of the economic market launched a number of profit-making magazines that relied heavily on advertising, and *City Magazine* followed this path³⁶. Second is the corporate change. Before having the interviews with the production team of the magazine, I was eager to

³⁶ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 89.



know their strategies of maintaining the status in print media industry even though I found that they didn't have branding concept in the 80s. After all, I think the uniqueness and attractiveness of *City Magazine* is they don't have concrete plans in marketing or branding; they kind of let it flow. They are not doing things to attract readers or to bring new readers in, they do things they think that are interesting and meaningful. Whoever is attracted to *City Magazine* would be their target audience. From Chun³⁷, we are able to see that the initial structure of the magazine meant that editors were the shareholders before the 1990s, and this changed when the shareholders of the magazine were from more corporate backgrounds.

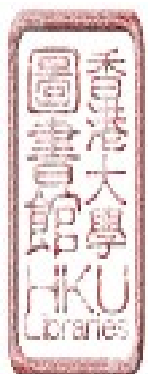
Corporate structure has imposed limitations on the operations of the magazine. In 2003, *City Magazine* was acquired by Modern Media, a company largely involved in the acquisition and publication of various other lifestyle magazines in Hong Kong.³⁸ Modern Media operated and continues to operate as a media conglomerate founded by businessman and former economic researcher for the Chinese government, Shao Zhong³⁹. The new structure under Modern Media has seen media executives play the role of "cultural instructors" in the beginning before being modified to "content providers"⁴⁰. Such nuances in definition contribute to the mode in which content and culture is interpreted by the magazine. While the former sounds restrictive and even structured, the latter allows freedom

³⁷ Chun, Allen. "Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry" in *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 198.

³⁸ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 78.

³⁹ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 78.

⁴⁰ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 78.



in the production process, which conforms to the initial core values of the magazine from its genesis.

Using New Media

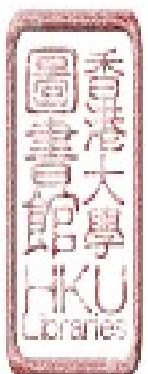
Former Chief Editor Chang aptly terms the magazine as one that keeps up with the times, and City Magazine has more recently been doing this through social media. Aside from giving their current readers up to date information of soon-to-be-released issues and the production process, one of the encouraging attempts to use this platform is by correlating content in current publications with similar news topics around the world. They reflect the client-oriented connections Creative Director Ching Siu Wai talks about in her interview. Furthermore, such connections demonstrate the wider, unfettered connections that have come about as a result of increased Internet use.

CONCLUSION

City Magazine is an illustration of how Hong Kong in the 1980s and 1990s was an information provider as well as a symbol of the modern imagination and how this role came to diminish in the 2000s, when publication focused on more socially conscious and concentrated on smaller audiences.⁴¹ The ambitions of *City Magazine* have certainly changed, from representing counterculture⁴² to becoming more culturally oriented. Nevertheless, the magazine does attempt to cover aspects within Hong Kong culture that are not necessarily comfortable in the larger context. Former Chief Editor cites the Umbrella movement and homosexuality as some of the topics they have had difficulty highlighting because of their sensitive nature.

⁴¹ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 88.

⁴² Chun, Allen. "Sketching the Discursive Outlines of Cosmopolitan Hybridity in Postwar Hong Kong: City magazine and the Emergence of 1980s Popular Culture and Culture Industry" *Doing Families in Hong Kong*, ed. Kwon B. Chan. (Brill Publishers: Leiden, Netherlands. 2009), 203.

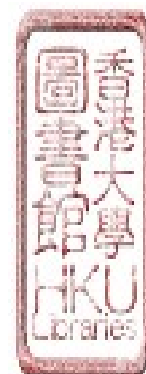


In light of its influence on current consumerism, *City Magazine* plays an adequate is not significant role in comparison with the 1980s. They still realize the importance of keeping with the times to maintain desirability⁴³ and have been able to maintain their identity in a world where anonymity as a result of technology is the norm. The production team understands the importance of visual judgment, so although advertising has significantly reduced as we learn from the Creative Director Ching Siu Wai, the visual appeal of the magazine has not been lost⁴⁴. The present client-focus of the magazine as part of its branding strategy has kept it in rhythm with society. The rhythm with society is further reflected in its adaptation of new media such as Facebook to reach out to consumers, maintain readership and interest.

The magazine's "culture orientation" may be interpreted as a narrowing of their content and topics in comparison with coverage in the 1980s; however, it also reflects their need to make Hong Kong a better place, as said by Former Chief Editor, Chang Tieh Chih. In the Literature Review, it was discussed how much of the structure and conceptualization of the magazine was informed by aspirations rather than the reality. Youth culture felt disenfranchised so they formed almost an anti-movement that stood outside social norms. Their movement did not change the society. If anything, it made them more indulgent and self-centered. Corporate ownership has perhaps changed the ethos of *City Magazine* to make it more answerable to the society and responsive to their plight in a less commercialized manner.

⁴³ Marx, Karl. "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *The Consumer Society Reader*, ed. Martyn J. Lee. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000)

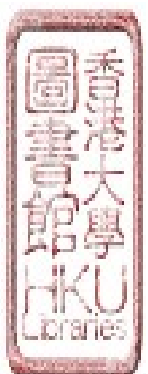
⁴⁴ Ma, Eric Kit-wai. *Desiring Hong Kong, Consuming South China: Transborder Cultural Politics*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 2011), 89.



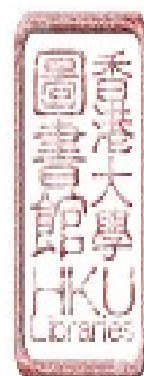
Perhaps the most concrete idea learnt from *City Magazine* is that there is a distinction between marketing and branding. While marketing is a short lived concept and works from product to product, having a brand is more important than any marketing strategy. A brand is enduring and recognizable. *City Magazine* is a brand, not merely a marketing product. It is the identity of Hong Kong through the ages, and even with different people at the helm or behind the scenes in production, the magazine has managed to maintain its market share and reputation. As a brand, it has done its best to adapt in terms of media and content. Its lack of strategy has enabled it to have a flexible production process, and encouraged it to easily adopt varying ideas and concepts. As mentioned a few times, lack of strategy does not undermine the working process or the input in producing the magazine. The team is governed by its strong ethos and discipline. This sense of discipline that defines Hong Kong is reflected in the consistent publications of the magazine for the long period of 39 years.

Of course the magazine has done its best to adapt with the changing times. They have a Facebook page that enables them to stay in touch with their readers and reach out to more people familiar with the platform. With time, *City Magazine* should offer subscriptions of digital back and current editions to reduce the cost of production and print publication and to hasten access of content and material.

On the whole, the magazine is synonymous with Hong Kong's own endurance through financial hardships in the early 1990s, its political isolation prior to the 1990s and the way in which it managed to create an identity that was separate from the rest of China and its environs. The process of producing *City*



Magazine pays homage to this progress, which is true to their own testament in issue 148 of December 1988 that “every great city deserves a City Magazine.”



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